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[Information on the ticiži, the "Titled Ones," the office nobility of the Nupe state, has been placed in category 565. --Analyst]

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
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Out of this large and varied income the king gave directly very little to the common weal: he 'financed' certain public works, the repair or the building of the city mosque, his own palace, and the town walls and gates. The work itself was organized by the members of the lower nobility and carried out by their slaves and serfs; the king contributed only food and drink for the labourers, and small presents for the men in charge of the work. From his income, but assisted by gifts from other members of the royal house, the *Etsu* also paid the annual tribute to the Emir of Gwandu, by which the kings of Bida recognized the sovereignty of that ancient centre of the Fulani Empire.[1] Finally, the king, equipped his army with horses and arms, and formed of his personal slaves the police force which had to keep order in markets and streets. But indirectly the king contributed very considerably to the economic life of the country. The court was the centre round which the economic and cultural life of the capital revolved. The splendour of the court life of Nupe, famous in Nigeria, meant work and income for thousands, incessant production in the workshops of the craftsmen, and rich business for the merchants. Beautifully built houses to live in; gorgeous gowns, horses, saddles, arms, to be given as presents to courtiers and members of the household; food and drink, music and dances, for the great feasts celebrated at court, these were (and still are) the daily needs of the royal household. Presents play an important part in the etiquette of Nupe kingdom: from a small bowl of kola-nuts to a silk gown or a horse range these expressions of the king's favour. And at the great Mohammedan festival of the year, the *Sallah* as it is called in Nigeria, every one of the hundreds of people who by the right of birth or status are entitled to the king's attention are honoured with a smaller or larger gift. To be left out means disgrace; and the sending of a present to a man with whom the *Etsu* was known to be on bad terms expresses conspicuously reconciliation and new favour.

Of the former sources of royal income only two have survived under modern conditions: profits from occasional trade, and the proceeds of the royal estates (materially reduced by the transformation of slave labour into labour on the métayer system, or even wage-labour; see p. 200). To this we have to add to-day the Emir's considerable salary. On the other hand, his expenses, too, have been greatly reduced: public works, the upkeep of a police force, even the building of the royal residence, now form items on the list of Native Administration expenditure. But all the current expenses, all those demanded by status and prestige, by the etiquette of the kingdom, and by the necessity of winning supporters for himself and his house, are still as much part of the unwritten obligations of an *Etsu* Nupe as they ever were.

A DAY OF COURT ROUTINE

Every morning the *Etsu* mounts his horse and, accompanied by members of his household and some of his officers of state, rides round

[1] In the last period of British rule this tribute consisted of 100 gowns worth £300, 200 gowns worth £125, and one silver sword worth £10.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
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the walls of his house. This morning ride is still part of the daily routine of the *Etsu* Nupe, even up at his modern brick residence which stands by itself on the hill outside the town. He may extend his ride to visit his *esoži*, a short distance away, and inspect his farms, or possibly to inquire after his guests—for visitors of standing who have come from far away are assigned quarters in the *esoži*. Once when I accompanied the *Etsu* on this ceremonial morning ride he went to see a Nupe Mallam who had returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca and stopped in Bida as the king's guest on his way home. Another time two noblemen from Sokoto, relatives of the Sultan, had come on a visit to Bida and were invited to stay in the *esoži*. Later in the morning, back in his house, the *Etsu* receives the first official visitors of the day: the *Etsu Dogari* and the *Sarkin Yandoka*, the chiefs of the two police forces of the Emirate, who come to bring him the 'news of the town'—arrests made on the market the night before, a case of small-pox in one of the town quarters, and so forth. The *Alkali* and his Chief Assistant drop in to pay their respects, possibly to report on an important law-case, before they go down to the Court House in the centre of the town. The guild-head of the traders may present himself in order to inform the *Etsu* of the arrival in Bida of traders or a trading caravan with new attractive goods which the *Etsu* might care to inspect. Messengers come and go—from the Native Administration Treasury, or the Divisional Office, the Bida Town Council, or from a District Head. In the meantime the highest officers of state, the members of the Emir's Council, have arrived in his house for the daily *nkó*, the Council of State. At the *nkó* all matters of importance are discussed; or there may be legal cases on the day's agenda. For the *nkó* has also judicial functions and tries cases referred to it from a lower court. The session of the *Etsu*'s Council concludes the official duties of the day. In the afternoon the *Etsu* might see friends or visitors in his house, or drive through the town in his splendid motor-car—one of the modern symbols of royal prestige.

The climax of Bida Court life is the celebration of the Friday. On Thursday night and again on Friday afternoon the *Etsu* rides in great state to the mosque in the town, and on Friday at his return he holds a reception in his house which is attended by every man of rank and standing. Envisage this Friday procession: king and courtiers on horseback, in their sumptuous gowns, the king under the great silken state umbrella, the horses with trappings of silver and beautiful cloth; a bodyguard carrying swords, and police with their staffs, are running ahead, shouting the *Etsu*'s name or blessing formulae or little proverb-like sentences which illustrate the king's greatness; drummers are beating their drums, three mounted trumpeters blow the huge bronze *kakati* in an incessant deafening chorus; with it blend the shrill notes of the *algeita*, the Hausa oboe, while another musician is beating an iron double bell with a wooden stick, shouting and singing at the same time. All streets are lined with people, adults and children, who watch, fascinated, this procession, bearing witness to the impressiveness of this display of royal power. And then, back again in the royal palace: the wide place in front of the house and the courtyard are crowded with people; the *talakaži*—

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
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the commoners, men without name and rank—sit and stand outside, chatting and watching what there is to watch; the members of the privileged classes, titled nobility, and Mohammedan priests, are sitting in the inner courtyard and in *katamba* (entrance-halls), each *katamba* reserved for a special group. Only royal princes and the highest officers of state are admitted to the presence of the *Etsu*; they sit in the inner part of the house together with personal friends and favourites of the king.[1] All these people come to pay their respect to their sovereign, to see and to be seen, to exercise prerogatives, or to proclaim their connexion with the privileged and mighty. This external arrangement of the Friday ceremonial is indeed a symbol of the whole social structure of Nupe kingdom with its rigid system of etiquette and precedence, its differentiation of status, rank, and prerogatives, and its display of wealth and power. This structure we must now analyse in detail.

THE ROYAL NOBILITY

The descendants of the house of Mallam Dendo, under their three heads *Etsu*, *Shaba*, and *Kpotū*, form the royal nobility of Nupe, the *ena gitsúši*, the Group of Those who will become King. They are *gitsúši* in the sense that from their ranks the new king is elected. The titles of nobility which they hold by the privilege of birth may lead every one of them, by slower or more rapid promotion, eventually to the highest rank, kingship. In most cases the royal prince who succeeds to the throne has reached first the rank of *Shaba*; the change from old to new king is thus made almost automatic, a dangerous interregnum is avoided, and the fight between the rival factions is confined to the less dangerous sphere of competition for the ranks next to the king. Only twice was a man who had not reached the title of *Shaba* (or, if the *Shaba* had died, the title of *Kpotū*) made *Etsu*.[2] In 1936 there existed, or more precisely, were actually held, 41 royal ranks, of which 10 fell to the house of Usman Zaki, 17 to the house of Masaba (the house which had supplied the last

[1] The arrangement at these receptions, the way in which the people who are admitted to the presence of the *Etsu* group themselves, is invariably the same. It is shown in this diagram:

Two bodyguards with ostrich fans
Etsu (on state bed)
Gitsúši — *Ndeji* — *Sarakiši*
Mayaki
Liman-Alkali
Mallams

[2] These exceptions were *Etsu* Mohamadu who, only *Makū*, was appointed *Etsu* by the Niger Company, and the present *Etsu* who had been *Nágwu*, but had held the important office of a District Head of Jima. It is the present tendency of the Administration to abolish the office of *Shaba* and to make the appointment to kingship a free election from the royal ranks. After the death of the late *Shaba* in 1935 no new *Shaba* has been appointed. It is not yet clear what effect, if any, this innovation will have upon the internal dynastic organization. The threefold system is so deeply rooted that I believe the effect will be only to abolish a name, and that the rank next in order in the dynastic section will assume the main function of the abolished rank, that is, headship of the dynastic clan.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
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of slaves: slaves for menial work—in the house and on the land—as well as the titled slaves of respected position. At the court this latter group of slaves formed the *ena wuši*, the Order of Court Slaves, a distinguished slave *élite* into which only few selected slaves could ever hope to be admitted. From the slaves captured in war those of high birth and status, chiefs or distinguished warriors, were selected for the court. These, too, were given ranks and titles, and could rise high in the service of the king. Theirs was the specialized service of officials and trusted royal agents. There were those who looked after the king's vast household; those who were in charge of the *Etsu* Nupe's no less imposing harem—both offices formerly entrusted to eunuchs.[1] Other slaves formed the king's bodyguard and police force; they were provincial delegates, tax collectors, trusted messengers, 'liaison officers' between the king's palace and the houses of his noblemen, and between the king and the army in the field. These slaves, like the other rank-holders, owned land and held fiefs. The Nupe kings in Rabá are said to have had only four titled court slaves; the slave ranks that existed at the court of Bida some thirty years ago (and the ranks still exist, although their holders are no longer slaves) were more than three times that number. Under *Etsu* Maliki, one of the last independent kings of Nupe, the most responsible state offices were taken from royal princes and *sarákiši* and entrusted to slaves. The position of the slaves as officers of state thus seems to have overshadowed more and more all other state ranks. Slave ranks were ranks bestowed *ad personam*, and ranks bestowed by the king personally, independent of the council of princes and ministers; and this gives us the explanation for their rise in importance. The offices linked with civil and military rank also depended to some extent on the personal favour of the king. But once appointed, these men stayed on, servants of the kingdom rather than of the king. They had behind them the claims of powerful families, they were exponents of political factions, and could play on that 'balance of power' between the dynasties. The slaves were personal servants in the full sense of the word. They were brought into office, not by family claims or promotion or a rigid rule of succession, but by personal appointment, selection, and trial. They were bound to the king's service generation after generation, by the strongest bond: their position of unfree men. It frequently happened that a new *Etsu* took over the slaves who had served his predecessor and left them their ranks and possessions. The rise of the slave officials at the Fulani court is the counterpart of the rise of a powerful, dangerously independent feudal nobility.

The following is a list of slave ranks held to-day, not by slaves, but by former slaves or descendants of slaves at the court of the *Etsu* Nupe. I have again tried to indicate in what manner they received their title, and also in certain cases the office which some of them are holding to-day in the Bida Town Administration. That so many of these former slaves

[1] In the pre-Fulani kingdom the court is said to have employed only a few slaves—all eunuchs. All slave ranks which have a *nda* in their title, meaning 'father' (ranks that are still in use—see attached chart), were originally ranks reserved for eunuchs.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
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CHAPTER IX
THE POSITION OF THE WOMEN

RANKS AND OFFICES

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IT speaks for the consistency of the political system of Nupe that the position of the women, too, should be drawn into its orbit and even into the framework of official grades and ranks. Among the women of royal blood in pre-Fulani Nupe three women's ranks existed: *Nimwoye*, *Sagi*, and *Wogbo*. Precedence and succession in these three ranks corresponded to the succession in the three highest *gitsú* titles. At the court of ancient Nupe the titles were bestowed by the king on his mother or father's sister, elder sister, or daughter. The holder of the title had to be a *nyizagi gbakó*, a 'strong woman', that is, a woman of about 40–50 years. She had to be unmarried, or else her marriage would be formally dissolved on her appointment to the rank, and she would forthwith be regarded as unmarried. She lived, not in the house of her husband or father but in the *Etsu*'s own house. The Fulani adopted the first two ranks, abandoning, however, the condition of celibacy or nominal celibacy, and made the two daughters of Manko the first *Sagi* and *Nimwoye*. The two ranks have remained in the royal house of Nupe since then. After the split of the dynasty into three branches the women's ranks followed the new dynastic division, the title *Nimwoye* being assigned to the women of the royal house of Masaba, and the title *Sagi* being taken, in rotation, by the women of the royal houses of Umaru and Usman. This rule still holds good: the present *Sogi*, for example, is a sister of the late *Etsu* Bello of the house of Usman, and the *Sagi* before her was an elder sister of the *Shaba*, of the house of Umaru.

The women rank-holders occupied an extremely influential position at the court. They took part in the king's council, they could join in the war with their own troops of slaves and serfs, they held fiefs and owned land. Theirs was the position of 'kings over the women of Nupe'. Although these political prerogatives have disappeared, the position of authority vested in these women's ranks is unimpaired. All quarrels between women, especially women of the noble families, are brought before them; the women of Bida and the villages send them presents and receive counter-presents from them, much as is the custom between the noblemen of Nupe and their king. *Sagi* and *Nimwoye* are often the official representatives of the court at the family feasts of the Bida nobility. At the name-giving ceremony which was celebrated in the house of the *Shaba* in 1936 the *Sagi* came to bring presents and congratulations from the *Etsu*—an honour which was duly appreciated by all who were present.

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Among the Bida women of low birth, the wives and daughters of commoners, we find another women's rank, *Sonya*.[1] She is, as the Nupe

[1] The Nupe word *Sonya* corresponds to the Hausa word (and the equivalent women's rank) *sarauniya*, lit. queen. *Sō* or *So* is a Nupe root meaning head or chief.

[p. 147]